

indicated that he repeatedly asked what was to be done with them but received no answers. At 2:00 they were again marched amid yells and shouts from mobs down Market Street and up Front Street to the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad depot.³⁰ Melton recalled that near the intersection of Princess and Front, a man rushed out of the crowd wearing a “special police badge” and punched him in the temple with a rifle. A. P. Adrian of the WLI intervened and stopped the attacker with his sword. At the depot, the men were forced on the train bound for New Bern. The whites in New Bern had received advance warning that the train was on its way, and leaders there did not allow the men to stop in town. Although Melton knew the New Bern chief of police, he could not get protection since they “hourly expected a similar trouble to that we had in Wilmington.” From New Bern, Melton and the others were sent to Elizabeth City by boat and from there to Norfolk by train where they met “some little abuse.” From Norfolk, the exiles headed to Washington, D. C. Melton had not returned to the city since his exile and was, instead, living in limbo, calling the town of Magnolia his home. Melton closed his account of his treatment at the hands of the mob by recalling that his captors took “the pleasure of marching me right in front of my wife and children.”³¹

Mayor Silas P. Wright was also targeted. He was advised to leave the city on the eleventh, and he requested an extension of a day to collect his effects. Wright was able to make arrangements for

his departure quickly and slipped out of town by nightfall on the eleventh in order to avoid treatment similar to that received by Melton, Bunting, Gilbert, and French.³² Before his departure, Wright was seen riding through town accompanied by James Sprunt as they attempted to “abate the excitement and prevent needless bloodshed.”³³ Wright was disliked by the Democratic leaders because he exemplified the concept of relocated northerner who courted black votes. Further, many Democrats claimed he was unqualified for the job.³⁴

The harassment of the banished men by Wilmington leaders and other white supremacy advocates did not end at the city limits or as time progressed. Melton, Bunting, Manly, Miller, and Bryant, among others, were tracked as various modes of transport moved them further northward. Short articles in Wilmington and Raleigh papers provided daily updates on the progress of the men with headlines such as “Arrived in Washington,” “Keep ‘Em Moving,” and “Wicked Find No Consolation.”³⁵ Telegrams were sent before the exiles arrived, informing residents of the impending arrivals and forwarding requests to continue to push the men along. The men were pushed further north from Manchester, Virginia, on the fifteenth.³⁶

³⁰ Later reports of the march for Melton, Bunting and Gilbert indicated that one of the epithets shouted at the men was “white nigger.” *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 15, 1898.

³¹ Melton refused to provide all details of the campaign and riot that he knew because his family still lived in the city and they had “trouble enough” without his testimony adding “personal controversy.” *Contested Election Case*, 360-366, 382, 386.

³² As they were shoved onto outbound trains, the men were “told in forcible language that if ever again they set foot in Wilmington they would be shot on sight.” *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 15, 1898.

³³ *Wilmington Messenger*, November 15, 1898; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 13, 1898.

³⁴ Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 34, 50.

³⁵ *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 16, 17, 1898; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 15, 1898.

³⁶ The papers reported that refugee whites, Melton, Bunting, French, and blacks, George Brown, T. C. Miller, and another man with the last name Branch were in Norfolk on November 14. George Brown was severely beaten at the post office although he claimed he had been visiting Wilmington from Canada and working in a confectionary while there.